

News story: Level playing field for all operators is key aim of traffic commissioners

Sarah Bell, the London and South East Traffic Commissioner, has used the actions of two bus companies to highlight the importance of providing a level playing field for all operators.

At the conclusion of a public inquiry last month, she said the commissioners' role is protect operators when fair competition is compromised.

She added that failing to complete forms and ignoring guidance, as the two operators had, was a gross breach of trust.

"Traffic commissioners understand that we live in challenging times. We have done for years," Miss Bell remarked.

"But we regulate for the benefit of all operators including those suffering the same operating challenges.

"Margins are tight, but if you choose to operate buses, coaches or lorries, then there are rules to be met and they are there to make sure that standards are maintained for public safety."

Forms and guidance, Miss Bell pointed out, aren't just administrative paperwork. They are the "bedrock" on which commissioners ensure road safety and fair competition.

"It is essential not just because there is an operator's licence – all directors of companies across Great Britain have a statutory duty to exercise independent judgement, skill, care and diligence."

The two firms, Renown Transport Services Limited and Eastbourne Coachways Limited, were criticised by the Traffic Commissioner for failing to disclose links between their businesses ahead of a pre-pack sale.

Renown entered financial difficulties and tried to save parts of the firm, with a view to resurrecting it via Eastbourne Coachways. This left HMRC, trade creditors and some financial institutions out of pocket.

Before all of this was disclosed, Eastbourne Coachways had applied to the Traffic Commissioner's Office to get special permission to run bus services at short notice. This followed Renown cancelling its services without giving legal notice.

Operators are required to give certain periods of notice to local authorities and the Traffic Commissioner's Office before they can start, change or stop running a bus service.

Miss Bell told both companies their actions were “not how we do things”. She added that the regulations, legislation and processes are very clearly set out in guidance and on the relevant forms.

Concluding that the firms had “avoided a whole process”, the Commissioner said she couldn’t step back from revoking the licences held by both companies and noted compliant bus operators are entitled to protection.

Miss Bell also remarked on the importance of local authority transport officers better understanding the role of traffic commissioners and giving greater consideration to the fair competition element when supporting applications by bus operators who want permission to run services at short notice.

Decisions

The public inquiry was held on 13 March 2019.

The operator’s licence held by Renown Transport Services Limited was revoked with immediate effect.

The operator’s licence held by Eastbourne Coachways Limited will be revoked from 23:45 on 24 July. Until that time, the licence will be reduced from 16 to 8 vehicles.

[Press release: £60 million search begins for the next Peppa Pig, Art Attack and Desert Island Discs](#)

The hunt for the next big thing in radio and young people’s television has begun, as applications opened today for a share of a Government financed £60 million fund set up to provide a boost to the UK’s Radio and Television sector.

Over the past decade the output of children’s television from public service broadcasters (PSBs) in the UK has been in decline, with them spending roughly 40% less than they did in 2006.

As a result a significant amount of programming on children’s channels now consist of repeats. [The Young Audiences Content Fund](#) (YACF), being administered by the British Film Institute (BFI), will aim to help reverse that trend and is the first of its kind to specifically focus on television for young people under the age of 18.

The [Audio Content Fund](#) (ACF) will be used to produce distinctive, public

service radio programming that is traditionally more difficult to support on a commercial basis. This includes programmes such as documentaries, comedy, drama and light entertainment.

Both funds will also provide a boost to indigenous UK languages programming such as Welsh and Gaelic, with an aim to invest five per cent of the total fund on this.

Minister for Digital and Creative Industries Margot James said:

Young people in the UK deserve high quality content that entertains, informs and reflects their experiences growing up across the country today.

The UK's broadcast sectors reach hundreds of millions of people of all ages around the globe and are a tremendous success story that we are justifiably proud of. This innovative project is an integral part of our ongoing support for the UK's vibrant media sector which we want to see go from strength to strength.

Both the YACF and the ACF will bring a positive injection of investment to their sectors, which will help create new avenues for creators of original content and bring new voices to the market.

Sam Bailey, Managing Director of the Audio Content Fund, said:

We're really excited to start receiving bids for the Audio Content Fund. It's going to be fascinating to see the great ideas the audio production sector has to offer, and where the fund can make a difference on the UK's commercial and community radio stations.

It's clear that the ACF is going to develop creative collaboration between sections of our community that may not otherwise have the opportunity to work together, and we're looking forward to hearing innovative radio that gives a platform to new and diverse voices around the UK.

Jackie Edwards, Head of the Young Audiences Content Fund at the BFI, said:

It is such a thrill to throw the Fund doors open, and a privilege to help support the development and production of brilliant, innovative television programmes that uniquely reflect the lives of children across the UK. Thanks to investment from the DCMS, this Fund has the power to create a real cultural impact in this country, fostering creativity, helping grow and preserve the Public Service Broadcast landscape and best of all, creating exciting, nourishing content that the audience will treasure for life.

Information on how to apply and what the administrators are looking for is available on the BFI's and the ACF websites.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- In 2016, 98% of children's content on commercial children's channels and 91% on public service broadcasters were repeats.
- In 2017, Ofcom found that over 40% of 12-15 year olds felt that the content they watched did not reflect their lives.
- Production levels of new children's content have declined over the past decade, with public service broadcasters spending roughly 40% less than they did in 2006 (down from £116 million in 2006 to £70 million in 2017).
- Commercial radio is listened to by 65% of UK adults (over 35 million people) every week.
- Commercial radio stations broadcast an average of 13 hours of public service content each week, mostly consisting of news and sport, travel, weather, charity appeals and local events.
- The pilot is also aimed at stimulating greater variety in a market where the BBC is often the dominant buyer and broadcaster of children's content. In 2016, the BBC accounted for 87% of all first run UK originated children's programming by PSBs.

[Press release: Isle of Axholme to benefit from £35m flood protection investment](#)

An 80-year-old pumping station is to be given a new lease of life, bringing environmental and flood-risk benefits to an area almost twice the size of Birmingham, the Environment Agency has announced.

The work is part of a £35m investment to upgrade Keadby Pumping Station near Scunthorpe and construction is set to get underway from mid-April. Preparation work on the site is currently underway.

The improvements will see the facility's diesel pumps replaced by more reliable and efficient electric versions. As well as reducing flood risk, the new pumps will also lessen the station's carbon footprint and are designed to be safe for fish and eels.

Keadby Pumping Station is used to manage water levels across the Isle of Axholme – around a 500 kilometre square area of North Lincolnshire, South Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire.

The facility helps reduce the risk of flooding by transferring flood water from the 'Three Rivers' into the River Trent during high tides.

The Pumping Station reduces flood risk to more than 15,000 homes, 30,000 hectares of high-grade agricultural land, businesses, internationally important habitats, and critical infrastructure such as transport links, a power station and Doncaster Sheffield Airport.

The current station has reached the end of its working life. The current pumps and equipment are unreliable, costly to maintain and are increasingly at risk of breaking down.

The scheme also includes the construction of new electrical equipment buildings within the existing site and rebuilding of the outfall headwall, where the 'Three Rivers' discharges to the River Trent.

The introduction of 'fish-friendly' pumps will mean both fish and eels can pass safely through the facility, helping them overcome man-made obstacles to their natural migration. The measure is recognised as vital to protecting wildlife and improving the health of rivers.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

The Isle of Axholme will benefit greatly from this £35m government funding which will better protect the local community and businesses from flooding for years to come.

I am pleased to see the plan will not only bring more protection against flooding, but also have environmental benefits for wildlife and improve the health of the rivers in the area.

I look forward to seeing the work completed.

Andrew Haigh, the Environment Agency's senior advisor for flood risk management, said:

The £35m investment in a new state-of-the-art pumping station at Keadby will enable us to continue to protect over 15,000 homes, businesses and agricultural land from the risk of flooding across the Isle of Axholme.

We have been working in partnership with the local authorities and the Internal Drainage Boards on our plans to upgrade the current facility with new electric pumps and equipment that will increase reliability and efficiency, leading to more effective water level management in this area. It also offers improved access for fish and eels to migrate between the 'Three Rivers' and the River Trent.

The contract to design and build the improved flood defence has been awarded

to GBV, a joint venture between Galliford Try and Black & Veatch.

Press release: EU Exit Local Government Delivery Board: March 2019 update

The Government Brexit Delivery Board has been meeting more frequently as the UK prepares to leave the EU, with recent meetings taking place on both 26 February and 18 March.

Communities Secretary, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, chaired the February meeting at which representatives from the Local Government Association, County Councils Network, District Councils Network and London Councils, provided updates and feedback.

Government ministers from DExEU, DHSC, DfE, DEFRA and a senior official from DfT were in attendance to discuss departmental preparations.

Local Government Minister, Rishi Sunak MP, chaired the March meeting.

In addition to the broad range of English local government representation, representatives of devolved administration councils – Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) – were in attendance – having been invited by the Communities Secretary to hear an update from Home Office Minister, Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP.

The minister provided a comprehensive update on the UK Settled Status Scheme ahead of its launch on 30 March.

News story: Government funds research into knife-detection technology

Six UK companies have been funded a share of more than £460,000 to fast-track innovative technologies that aim to detect people carrying knives in crowded places such as streets, railway stations and major events.

Distinguishing concealed blades from other items such as keys and coins is challenging for the police, particularly among large crowds.

Now, with funding from the Home Office and Department of Transport, 6 companies are exploring how solutions involving radar and electromagnetic and acoustic sensors could help detect steel-bladed knives.

Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability Victoria Atkins said:

Recent senseless killings that have snatched young lives away have shocked people across the UK.

We are determined to protect families from these devastating crimes, and new technology must play a key role in this, together with effective early intervention work and strong law enforcement.

I'm pleased the government has been able to support these exciting and innovative projects which have the potential to rid our streets of dangerous weapons.

Transport Minister Andrew Jones said:

The safety of passengers is absolutely paramount and we are committed to tackling the scourge of knife crime. I've seen first-hand this week the exceptional work groups such as the British Transport Police are doing to tackle this issue, but more needs to be done.

That's why this funding is so important – it will help us identify ways in which technology can detect concealed knives, helping us keep people safe on our railways.

As part of the [Serious Violence Strategy](#), the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) and the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA), were tasked by the Home Office find new ways to tackle concealed steel-bladed knives.

Through a Home Office competition run by Dstl through DASA, which sought input from industry and academia, 6 proposals passed the rigorous testing process. Now, Security Screening Technologies Ltd, Iconal Technology Limited, Loughborough University, Xenint Ltd, Thales UK, Advanced Nano Tech and Scientific Ltd are each being funded a share of £463,665 by the government for 6 months to deliver proof of concept. They will be asked to demonstrate their findings this summer.

The focus is on technology that is safe, easy to operate, unobtrusive and suitable for indoor and outdoor use, and the work is being supported by the National Police Chiefs' Council.

If the projects perform to the desired level, the Home Office will work closely with the police to assess how these products could be used on the front line.

The announcement comes as the Prime Minister today (April 1) hosts [the Serious Youth Violence summit in Downing Street](#), bringing together attendees from a diverse range of backgrounds including law enforcement, health, the voluntary sector and education, and young people with experience living in communities impacted by serious violence.

Ahead of the summit, the government announced it is empowering more officers to [authorise enhanced stop and search powers](#) as part of continued action to tackle knife crime.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid is making it simpler for police to use Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. This empowers officers to stop and search anyone in a designated area without needing reasonable grounds for suspicion if serious violence is anticipated.

Last month, the government announced £100 million additional funding to support areas most affected by serious violence, boosting policing capacity and enabling the creation of new multi-agency violence reduction units.

Alongside support for the police, the Home Office continues to focus on early intervention as a key to securing sustainable reductions in serious violence. It recently appointed the charitable foundation Impetus to manage [its £200 million Youth Endowment Fund](#), as a major part of ensuring that more young people are not sucked into a life of crime and violence.